

MIDNIGHTS . TO BE REMEMBERED

Exodus 12:29; Acts 16:25; Matthew 25:6; Matthew 26:16

IT was a night to be remembered! Pharaoh was mad; his people were sad; the outlook was bad, but the Hebrew captives were glad. Moses had challenged the Egyptian ruler. The nation was on the verge of rebellion, and everybody was scared of the fearless stranger who once had been a prince in the royal household. Rumors suggested the leader of the slaves was planning another plague, but something strange was taking place. Lambs were almost unobtainable; sheep farmers were making their fortune. The captives never had much money, but those who had saved a little were buying young sheep. All the purchasers seemed anxious, and those without money were trading keepsakes, clothing, anything, in a desperate attempt to obtain a lamb. The Egyptians were amazed, for although the Hebrews had been shepherds, this ardent attempt to purchase animals had never been witnessed within the nation. People in the streets were seeking reasons for the sudden surge in business.

A Night of Redemption... Salvation

At midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn of the land of Egypt.
(Exod. 12:29)

All through the land the slaves were whispering, and messengers were hurrying from house to house saying, "This is the night. Be sure to do as Moses commanded." The night wore on. It was a few minutes before midnight, an uneasy calm had settled upon Egypt. The Israelites were within their homes, but none were sleeping. Strange marks were upon the lintel and doorways of their hovels. When the silence of the night was shattered, the people gravely smiled; the expected had happened. Moses was correct when he said, "For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the

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lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you
(Exod. 12:23).

Did any of the Hebrews have Egyptian friends who were invited to share their sanctuary? Did any foolish Hebrew reject the command of Moses and remain in the street to die? Those details were never revealed by the historian. Where people were, was more important than what they were. There was no racial bias with God. Color of skin and pride of race were never important in His sight. He loved everybody, and that guaranteed that all who sought His blessings were helped.

A Night of Rejoicing... Serenity

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God.
(Acts 16:25)

It was weird, extremely annoying, and inexcusable. At midnight when people were trying to sleep, two newcomers to the prison were singing. Disturbed convicts were complaining; were the new inmates crazy or just stupid? As the restlessness intensified, growls of complaint filled the jail and prisoners became angry. Everybody demanded silence, but their requests were ignored. Paul and Silas, the obstinate preachers who had defied the magistrates, were singing the praises of God. Their backs were still bleeding from a flogging received earlier in the day, but their pain could not destroy their peace. Their attitude

was amazing.

Men rose from their beds to stare into the darkness. Earlier complaints gave place to speculation. How could people sing when their bodies were filled with pain? It was incomprehensible. Then suddenly the ground began to shake and the prison walls commenced to tremble: "There was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed" (Acts 16:26). It was astonishing: in the middle of the night the road to freedom had been opened. The men could soon be hidden with friends or secluded in isolated places. This was the chance of a lifetime—but no one moved! The much-desired freedom seemed unattractive. As the songs of Paul and Silas increased, it became obvious their God had come to rescue His servants. The watching and listening men believed it would be wiser to stay close to the Christians than to be elsewhere alone. The missionaries were ecstatic; they knew that God, who had protected His people in Egypt, was quite capable of

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helping His followers in a prison. He, who had shaken the mighty house of Pharaoh, would have no difficulty breaking the locks of a jail house. He held the whole world in His hand.

A Night of Realization... Soul Searching
And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh. (Matt. 25:6)

Weddings celebrated in Bible times were very different from those celebrated today. Today, people make lavish preparation, arrange rehearsals, and prepare premarital banquets. When a bridegroom has to travel from a distant home, the timetables of air companies, trains, and other means of transportation make it possible, barring accidents, to predict the exact time of his arrival in the hometown of his bride-to-be. Such elaborate arrangements were not possible in Bible times. More often than not the bridegroom had to walk or ride a horse to his wedding. If numerous guests planned to attend the ceremony, they came in a joyous procession, accompanying the groom. Often they came in the evening, carrying torches and singing happy songs. Sometimes unexpected circumstances delayed the progress of the wedding party, and folk waiting to greet the new arrivals had to await their coming. All Hebrews understood this procedure. When Jesus spoke about the ten virgins who went to meet the bridegroom, He described a custom that every person understood.

This was to be a memorable occasion; a time of supreme excitement. The celebrations would continue for several days; there would be singing, dancing, and feasting. People could sleep when the joyous event terminated.

The disciples were fascinated. They remembered attending a wedding at Cana in Galilee when their Master had been a guest of honor. They could not forget how He had turned water into wine and prevented humiliation for the governor of the feast. The Savior was a very descriptive speaker, and when He told of the approach of the bridegroom their eyes shone with excitement. The Lord emphasized three simple facts.

1. The Foolish Maidens (Matt. 25:3)

It was impossible by listening or watching to identify the wise and the foolish virgins—they looked alike. Jesus said, "They took their lamps, and took no oil with them." The lamp to which the Lord referred

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was the small hand-held variety that could fit into the palm of the hand.

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It had a small handle, a hole in the top through which oil could be poured, and a lip through which the wick was inserted to lie flat on the top of the fuel. The lamp held only a small quantity of oil which had to be replenished often. Larger processions carried lanterns, but individuals used the small lamps. The reserve supply of oil was carried in a leather flask attached to the owner's belt or girdle. The fact that five of the ten maidens did not even bother to attend to this important business was a reflection on their character. Were they indifferent, forgetful, or inexperienced? Perhaps their anticipation of the coming festivities made them neglect their duty. It was never safe to assume too much. Maybe they thought the early arrival of the bridegroom would make lamps unnecessary. If that were the case, the lamps could have been left at home. Those negligent women were as people about to build an attractive home without materials; a sailor planning to sail around the world without a ship; a host about to feed hungry multitudes without food. Jesus said they were "foolish virgins."

2. The Fatal Mistake

There was plenty of time in which to review their situation, but unfortunately, ignoring the fact that a mistake might have been made, they slept. If the five wise virgins had been alert, they might have been accompanied by five sisters when they enjoyed the wedding celebrations. Jesus was describing coming events: the wedding of the Lamb, and the solemn fact that lost souls could reach the door of heaven and fail to gain admittance. The foolish virgins lit the wicks that fizzled only for a few moments. The outward symbol of Christianity is the lamp that gives light, but it is the Holy Spirit that makes Christians glow as they go forth to meet the Bridegroom.

3. The Final Message

"I know you not." The door was closed. The five virgins were outside, and an opportunity had been lost forever. Then Jesus continued: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 25:13). Three important facts had been expressed: (1) Life's greatest opportunity can arrive at any moment—be ready; (2) Life's greatest opportunity can pass quickly—be careful; (3) Life's greatest opportunity, once gone, may never return—be sure. The disciples never forgot this account of five young people left with thoughts of a wedding they never witnessed; their mistake was inexcusable.

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A Night of Remorse ... Sorrow

And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him. (Matt. 26:16)

It was very dark; a night that, for one demented soul, would never end. As far as Judas was concerned, the Light of the World had ceased shining. Poor man! The betrayer had not only managed the business affairs of the disciples of Jesus, he had been close to treasure of incalculable worth. Alas, his understanding had been influenced by the magnetism of thirty pieces of silver. He might have possessed a place of eminence in the kingdom of God, but unfortunately, his body was found at the end of a rope. One of his colleagues wrote,

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

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(1 John 1:1-3)

Judas and John were friends who shared the same table and followed the same Leader. John endured to the end and won a crown; Judas became a dropout and lost his soul: "Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself' (Matt. 27:3-5). There was no light at the end of his tunnel; he had no hope and nothing for which to live. He repented—was sorry for his treachery, but apparently, he had no faith. He never came back to Christ. Would it have made a difference had he wept at the feet of Jesus?

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